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SANS SOUCI

AFTER work we can, as Johnson said, fold our legs and have our talk out. We can get out of ourselves—"our noble shelves" should be a bookman's toast—say things that do not matter, read for human pleasure, and try not to pretend we know more about the War than our neighbours. The papers don't know much, and—well, I remember Coleridge's remark.

When he was touting for his paper, *The Watchman*, he was induced to smoke some yellow tobacco and filled the lower part of his pipe with salt. He rose with a face "like a wall that is white-washing" after a prolonged stupor, and was asked by way of relieving his embarrassment, "Have you seen a newspaper to-day, Mr. Coleridge?" "Sir!" (he replied, rubbing his eyes), "I am far from convinced that a Christian is permitted to read either newspapers or any other works of merely political and temporary interest." See chapter X. of the 'Biographia Literaria,' which is full of good things and philosophic twaddle cribbed from the Germans.

A Scottish soldier, talking of his own experience of wounds in the press recently, explained that, when he suffered heavily from shell-fire, he had to examine himself before he knew where he had been hit; and that, although his wounds won him his discharge from the Army, he had less pain altogether than he had from tooth-ache at school. I can quite believe it. The dentist without gas may be worse than many war wounds. They are unpremeditated. Apprehension about him comes long beforehand, and there is no glory in the business. One suspects the

worst: Chesterfield talks of lying like a dentist.

Shock is a wonderful deadener, when combined with excitement, and excitement alone can do much. I have played and run through a football match with a hacked leg on which I could not walk afterwards, and which kept me in bed and in fiery bandages for four weeks. Livingstone, when a lion seized and tore his shoulder and shook him as a dog does a rat, remained conscious, but felt no sense of pain or feeling of terror. Whymper, falling several hundred feet in the Alps and bounding from rock to rock, neither lost consciousness nor suffered pain. These things are a credit to our much abused nervous system, and the seat of what we playfully call—the phrase is Stevenson's—human intelligence.

If diplomacy (of which I know little) is the art of saying nothing, Orientals seem to me much better fitted for it than Europeans. I mean, saying nothing gracefully: so I do not include Gladstone. Ras Makonnen, of Abyssinia, some years since was attacked by a French interviewer, who wanted to know whether he preferred France or England. He replied, "Is your respected mother still alive? May she teach you discretion!" Another query concerning Londoners he foiled with, "May God have you in his sacred keeping!" The rage for Publicity and the opinions of the eminent has spoilt art like this; and, just as it takes several hundred years to make a really fine grass lawn, real and baffling politeness may be confined to ancient civilisations.

My favourite diplomat in literature is Ouida's, "whose motto was not *pro Deo*,

but *pro Ego*." But his classical laurels are almost faded to-day in the light of modern efforts. I see that a paper has been making "*Suum Cuique*" into "I am what I am." Such versions are now too common to be notable, though they keep my collection of howlers going. I cherish a tender feeling for the defunct and half-penny journal which made Lucian into "Lucia of Samosaka, a Japanese lady." The ghost of the Atticist must have smiled at that, if he was not too busy talking with Aristophanes and Molière.

Dr. Boyd Carpenter was a mellifluous preacher, but I preferred his voice to his matter. His speed was the despair of the shorthand writers, but he could read really well. When I heard him at a Browning Celebration he seemed to make that difficult poet almost intelligible.

Browning never looked distinguished, though a white beard improves mediocre faces into dignity. I was not surprised to learn that he was born at Camberwell. He was exactly like one of the most commonplace booksellers I have ever known. Authors of this type give shocks to their admirers. The best-looking, apart from Goethe, have not often been of the first rank. Men of action, who are not slaves of

the desk, have naturally better figures and complexions, though the authors pose better for portraits. Of women-writers—I share Thackeray's objection to "author-ess"—Mrs. Gaskell alone approached the goddess; George Eliot was like a horse; and Charlotte Brontë introduced the ugly heroine.

Harrison Ainsworth was a handsome man; so too was Lockhart, who, when Landseer proposed to paint him, answered, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this?" The early portrait of Tennyson with long hair but no beard has the Spanish air, the touch of the proud Hidalgo which irritated some folks in Lockhart. Both he and Tennyson were reserved and too conscious of their power to suffer fools gladly. And Lockhart, being an editor, was like the Duke of Wellington, "very much exposed to authors."

A dignified bearing is quite out of date with us to-day, though it is common among Arab horse-stealers. It went out, they say, when Speaker Peel left his throne. We have, perhaps, only one statesman who looks always as if he were gazing at his own statue erected by a grateful public. And he is hampered, for he cannot talk slang with a demeanour like that!

—*Saturday Review*.

WIND AND TREE

BY JAMES STEPHENS

A woman is a branchy tree
And man a singing wind,
And from her branches carelessly
He takes what he can find:
Then man and wind go far away
While winter comes with loneliness,
With cold and rain and slow decay
On woman and on tree till they
Droop down unto the ground and be
A withered woman, a withered tree;
While wind and man woo undismayed
Another tree, another maid.